

Tree Selection for Hollywood Park Landscapes

It has been a tough 18 month drought on our landscapes, as we see live oaks dying from hypoxylon fungus (chocolate powdered spores covering the area under the exfoliating bark), southern magnolias dropping their leaves and desiccating, while the ligustrum and privet shrubs show off their brown cracking bark.

While June is not the ideal time to plant trees in central Texas, it can be done, especially if you are planting containerized trees and shrubs, and make sure that they get enough water for a few months to get established. Hopefully, we will continue to get some good rains that will bring back some critical deep soil moisture to our yards.

The tree canopy of Hollywood Park is essentially composed of live oaks, probably close to 80% or more of the mature trees. With oak wilt spreading at an average 70 feet per year, the properties near the oak wilt center can be decimated. A good strategy is to plant a diverse selection of tree species that are resistant to oak wilt well in advance of the disease. Much like diversifying your financial assets, you want to diversify your tree assets, as oak wilt only kills oaks.

While selecting the proper tree for your site is an intuitive and common-sense-approach process, it is not always followed. We get attached to the landscapes that we grew up with. But this is not east Texas, Colorado or Pennsylvania. We must use native or adapted species if we want to minimize maintenance requirements and have a landscape that fits the heritage of Central Texas.

The basic rules of selecting the right tree or shrub for the right place are:

Space: Make sure that the tree will fit the area you have selected. Pick a species that you will not have to prune when it matures. In other words will not interfere with the overhead utility lines, overgrow into the street right-of-way or rub into your house or outbuildings. There are small, medium and large trees that can be used to occupy the given planting and growing space. For example, a native tree that will mature to 15 feet would include Mexican plum, bluewood condalia, Texas redbud or evergreen sumac; medium size can be Texas mountain laurel or Texas pistache, and larger specimens trees such as cedar elm, big-tooth maple, post oak (if you can find them), pecan or bald cypress might do, if you have a large area.

Well Adapted: Try to select native stock. These are well adapted to the alkaline soils of our area, are drought resistant and have withstood the test of time. They also “fit” and look like they “belong” in central Texas.

Your Taste: There is not a qualified arborist or landscape designer that will be able to answer your question, “So what is the best tree to plant,” without first asking you, “What do you want the tree to do for you?” Trees provide different functions for different folks. You might want a tree/shrub that gives good fall color (big tooth maple, American smoketree, western soapberry or falseleaf sumac), or you may want one that is evergreen (Texas mountain laurel, agarita, or pinion pine). Perhaps you would like a specimen that attracts birds (hackberry or Texas persimmon) or has attractive flowers, such as Texas redbud, anacacho orchid tree or Esperanza).

To find out what is the best tree to plant in my yard? Visit <http://TexasTreePlanting.tamu.edu>

Next issue will explain proper tree and shrub planting techniques.